

‘That Uncouth Dialect’: English-Speaking Clergy in Late Medieval Gaelic Scotland

IAIN G. MACDONALD

On 2 August 1441 a supplication was filed at the papal curia against the vicar of Glenorchy in Argyll. It alleged that he was ‘utterly ignorant of the idiom accustomed to be spoken’ there and was therefore ‘unable fittingly to preach the word of God to the parishioners, hear confessions and administer the sacraments to the no little danger of the weal of the parishioners’ souls.’¹ On the face of it, this accusation was very serious, for the laity needed the sacraments to receive the grace necessary to win eternal salvation. Yet it was just one of a number of Scottish petitions to the Curia during the later middle ages that highlighted a cleric’s inability to speak the local vernacular as a reason for deprivation of their office. A peculiarly high number of these were to be found in the West Highlands of Argyll. This paper investigates the manner by which English-speaking clergy sought and received ecclesiastical benefices in the medieval Scottish *Gáidhealtachd*, who appointed them and why they did so. It argues that the papal supplications concerning language were motivated not by the realities of the *cura animarum*, but by change in the local political landscape and the regulations of the papal curia.

The issue of the language spoken by churchmen in the middle ages is most commonly associated with Ireland and the other ‘Celtic’ regions of the British Isles conquered by England. The Statutes of Kilkenny of 1366 and other discriminatory legislation enacted against Gaelic Irish clergy were countered by numerous complaints

¹ Annie I. Dunlop, David MacLauchlan and Ian B. Cowan (eds), *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome, 1433–1447* (Glasgow, 1983) [hereafter *CSSR 1433–1447*], no. 787.

to the papal curia regarding non-Gaelic-speaking incumbents. The Church in Wales also became a battleground against English oppression. In 1406 Owain Glyn Dŵr, the last native prince of Wales, petitioned to restrict future papal appointments to Welsh benefices to native speakers only following decades of earlier English appointments.² However, complaints from Gaelic Scotland and from Cornwall demonstrate that such problems did not necessarily follow an aggressive English conquest or proceed from a nationalist agenda.³ Indeed, such complaints were neither new nor exclusive to Celtic regions. Plantagenet England itself had become engulfed in linguistic turmoil during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries because of the huge influx of French clergy into the kingdom. Indeed, it was this disorder in part which prompted the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 to pass legislation concerning the issue.⁴ Even so, the requirement of a cleric to speak the local idiom appears to have been an issue throughout late medieval Europe, with languages as diverse as Portuguese, Catalan, French, Italian, Slavonic and Greek all featuring regularly in fourteenth-century papal registers concerning the necessity of churchmen skilled in the

² Ulrike Morét, 'Historians and Languages: Medieval and Humanist Views of Celtic Britain', in T. Brotherstone and D. Ditchburn (eds), *Freedom and Authority: Scotland c.1050–c.1650: Historical and Historiographical Essays presented to Grant G. Simpson* (East Linton, 2000), pp. 60–72; T. Crowley, *Wars of Words: The Politics of Language in Ireland, 1537–2004* (Oxford, 2005); R.R. Davies, *The Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 169–71; L. Beverly-Smith, 'The Welsh and English Languages in Late-Medieval Wales', in D.A. Trotter (ed.), *Multilingualism in Later Medieval Britain* (Cambridge, 2000), 7–21, at pp. 12–13.

³ W. H. Bliss et al. (eds), *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters*, 20 vols (London, 1893–) [hereafter CPL], xix, no. 629. This is the only Cornish example in papal records, but several more cases occur in the episcopal registers of bishops Grandisson and Edmund Laey of Exeter. My thanks to Professor Nicholas Orme for pointing out these cases.

⁴ N. P. Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: volume 1: Nicaea 1 to Lateran V* (London, 1990), p. 239; L. Iglesias-Rábade, 'The Multi-Lingual Pulpit in England (1100–1500)', *Neophilologus* 80 (1996), 479–492.

native tongue.⁵ It is with an eye to the wider context that we need to approach this subject when examining Scottish instances. However, in doing so we cannot overlook the fundamental importance of locality in the medieval Church. In medieval England it was the patron who determined the language of the pulpit,⁶ and we will discover this was also critical to the influx of English-speaking clergy into the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd*.

Pastoral Concerns

Several delators in Scotland mentioned defect of dialect only in passing, but others presented a grave picture of pastoral neglect. In addition to the aforementioned vicar of Glenorchy, a supplication in October 1441 alleged that parishioners in Lochgoilhead parish had also died without the sacraments of the Church because of the negligence of the vicar and his ignorance of the local idiom.⁷ Similarly, in April 1498 the vicar of Kilcalmonell – also allegedly ignorant of Gaelic – allowed several parishioners to die ‘without penance, the Eucharist or extreme unction’.⁸ Confession was, in one sense, the most important sacrament because it was the necessary preliminary to reception of the Holy Eucharist. A decent grasp of the vernacular was thus essential for a confessor, who needed to communicate effectively with the penitent in order to impose penance and give instruction on future conduct.⁹ However, ignorance of the local language should not have precluded the granting of the last rites, nor the celebration of Mass, recited in

⁵ P. Lecacheux and G. Mollat (eds), *Lettres secretes et curiales du pape Urbain V se rapportant à la France* (Paris, 1902–55), nos. 11250, 16931, 17440, 18822, 18945, 20276, 20915, 21057, 21081, 21804, 23309, 23840, 24176, 24199.

⁶ Iglesias-Rábade, ‘The Multi-Lingual Pulpit’, p. 481.

⁷ *CSSR 1433–1447*, no. 823.

⁸ *CPL*, xvi, no. 869. This doubtless referred to administering Viaticum. See G. Márkus, ‘The sick and the dying in the Book of Deer’, in K. Forsyth (ed.), *Studies on the Book of Deer* (Dublin, 2008), 67–97, at pp. 79–80.

⁹ J. Shinnars and W.J. Dohar (eds), *Pastors and the Care of Souls in Medieval England* (Notre Dame, 1998), pp. 170–85.

Latin.¹⁰ Although there were a number of regional rites in Western Europe, the liturgical rite in Argyll and most of the British Isles was conducted according to the Use of Sarum. With the exception of the homily, there were no other sections in this rite requiring the celebrant to use the vernacular.¹¹ Preaching and instruction in the rudiments of faith and morals were not an insurmountable problem either, for parish priests were obliged to preach to the faithful only four times a year. In addition, they could apply to the ecclesiastical authorities for a substitute to perform this duty on their behalf.¹² This would be a necessity where an incumbent was non-resident, which most of those accused of ignorance of Gaelic probably were; three of them actually faced accusations of non-residency, while others were university-educated careerist Lowlanders with multiple benefices

¹⁰ Prior to 1614, any prayer said with the correction intention was sufficient for validity of Extreme Unction. The only essential element or 'matter' was the act of anointing the recipient with oil blessed by the bishop accompanied by prayer. J. Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: an historical introduction to sacraments in the Christian Church* (London, 1981), pp. 379–84, 387; B. Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing of the Sick*, (trans.) F. Courtney (Freiburg, 1964), p. 247; B. Leeming, *Principles of Sacramental Theology* (London, 1960), pp. 421–22, 427. See also H. B. Porter, 'The Origin of the Medieval Rite for Anointing the Sick or Dying', *Journal of Theological Studies* vii (1956), 211–25.

¹¹ I. Campbell, 'A Romanesque Revival and the Early Renaissance in Scotland, c.1380–1513', *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 54.3 (1995), 302–325, at p. 303. R.E. Messenger, 'Hymns and Sequences of the Sarum Use: An Approach to the Study of Medieval Hymnology', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 59 (1928), 99–129, at p. 103. A late medieval ecclesiastical manuscript of Hebridean (probably Mull) provenance verifies the Use of Sarum in neighbouring Sodor diocese. See D. McRoberts and A. Boyle, 'A Hebridean Cisionianus' *Innes Review* [hereafter *IR*] 21 (1970), 108–123; F. T. Bergh, 'Sarum Rite', in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1912), from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13479a.htm>, [accessed 11 November 2008].

¹² *Pastors and the Care of Souls*, 128; D. Patrick (ed.), *Statutes of the Scottish Church 1225–1559*, Scottish History Society (Edinburgh, 1907), nos 195, 275.

and administrative offices.¹³ Some, such as Andrew of Denoon and John Duncanson, supplicants for the archdeaconry of Sodor and the rectory of Weem respectively, exploited their positions at the papal court to win livings which they never intended to serve personally.¹⁴ Duncanson, in particular, was notorious for using his papal connections to bring lawsuits against fellow clergymen.¹⁵ These and other non-Gaelic-speaking churchmen doubtless followed the example of James Scrymgeour, rector of Glassary, who employed ‘for a substitute a fit perpetual vicar well skilled in the language of that country’ to serve the cure.¹⁶

In late medieval Gaelic Ireland any shortcomings of the parochial clergy to preach God’s Word would be more than compensated by the corps of highly-trained and motivated mendicant friars willing to perform the role, for which there is substantial evidence.¹⁷ Unfortunately, the evidence for pastoral ministrations undertaken by friars in the late medieval Scottish Highlands is practically non-existent by comparison, but it seems inconceivable that there was no preaching activity undertaken. Several clans possessed traditional ties with the mendicant orders:

¹³ James Kirk, Roland J. Tanner and Annie I. Dunlop (eds), *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome, 1447–1471* (Edinburgh, 1997) [hereafter *CSSR 1447–1471*], nos. 598, 1126; *CPL*, x, p. 493. For the Argyll clerics, see Iain G. MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen: The Diocese of Argyll between the Twelfth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 202, 222, 247–48.

¹⁴ Denoon was abbreviator of apostolic letters in 1441. *CSSR 1433–1447*, no. 803. Duncanson, a procurator in Rome, exploited the vulnerability of his client, Hugh Martini, rector of Weem, to win the benefice. *CPL*, xvii, part i, nos 791, 928; xviii, no. 413; *Miscellany of the Scottish History Society*, iv, Scottish History Society (Edinburgh, 1926) [hereafter *SHS Misc. IV*], p. 356.

¹⁵ A. D. M. Barrell, ‘Royal presentations to ecclesiastical benefices in late medieval Scotland’ *IR* 55 (2004), 181–204, at pp. 195–6.

¹⁶ E. R. Lindsay and A. I. Cameron (eds), *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome, 1418–1422*, Scottish History Society (Edinburgh, 1934) [hereafter *CSSR 1418–1422*], p. 258.

¹⁷ N. Colmán Ó Clabaigh, ‘Preaching in late-medieval Ireland: the Franciscan contribution’, in A.J. Fletcher and R. Gillespie (eds), *Irish Preaching, 700–1700* (Dublin, 2001), 81–93.

the MacDougall lords of Argyll had supplied a continuous line of Dominican bishops of Argyll during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, while the Campbells and MacLachlans were donors to the Blackfriars of Glasgow and Stirling.¹⁸ In truth, it seems unlikely that the collation of non-Gaelic-speaking clergy made much practical difference to the spiritual welfare of their parishioners.

Papal supplications were by their nature one-sided and their statements did not give the whole picture of any particular case. Litigants in Argyll, for instance, did not always use an incumbent's ignorance of Gaelic against them if they could find stronger grounds for deprivation. For example, when seeking papal confirmation of his office in July 1441, the Gaelic archdeacon of Argyll restricted himself to stating that the papal nuncio to Scotland had already provided him to the post some years earlier, and chose not to highlight the obvious linguistic difficulties his non-Gaelic-speaking rival Peter of Dalkeith would have in the role.¹⁹ Other petitions demonstrate that supplicants were pragmatic in their desire to obtain a favourable outcome. In June 1466 a failed attempt was made to remove John Muir of the deanery of Argyll on the grounds of dialect, so four years later another petitioner tried to remove him on the grounds of an earlier papal reservation instead.²⁰ Ignorance of Gaelic was usually just one of a variety of charges brought against incumbents, sometimes featuring alongside allegations of concubinage and even murder.²¹ The contents of papal petitions were largely governed by pragmatic choice, being designed solely to win

¹⁸ Joseph Robertson (ed.), *Liber Collegii Nostre Domini ... Accedunt Munimenta Fratrum Predicatorum de Glasgu*, Maitland Club (Edinburgh, 1846); Stephen Boardman, *The Campbells, 1250–1513* (Edinburgh, 2006), pp. 118–20, 132.

¹⁹ *CSSR 1433–1447*, no. 782. The papal nuncio left Scotland in 1438. Boardman, *Campbells*, p. 144; D. E. R. Watt and A. L. Murray (eds), *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanæ Medii Aevi Ad Annum 1638*, Scottish Record Society (Edinburgh, 2003), p. 47 [hereafter, *Fasti*]; J. H. Baxter (ed.), *Copiale Prioratus Sanctiandree*, (Edinburgh, 1930), p. 461.

²⁰ *CSSR 1447–1471*, no. 1126; *CPL*, xii, p. 743.

²¹ A. D. M. Barrell, 'The church in the West Highlands in the late middle ages', *IR* 54 (2003), 23–46, at p. 29.

a judicial review of a cleric’s possession of a benefice. For this reason alone they cannot provide an accurate guide to the actual scale of non-Gaelic-speaking clergy in the late medieval Scots *Gàidhealtachd*.

A couple of cases, however, do help illuminate the picture for the linguistic historian. For instance, in 1366 a Gaelic archdeacon of Argyll requested a canonry in Dunkeld with expectation of a prebend because he knew ‘the language and idioms of both and speaks them well’.²² This suggests that though Dunkeld was located within the zone of Gaelic speech, English was already the vernacular tongue of Dunkeld’s cathedral clergy by the latter half of the fourteenth century. Similarly, the admission in 1441 by the archdeacon of Sodor, Andrew of Denoon, that he could only speak Gaelic ‘to a certain extent’ and not sufficiently to preach ‘in that uncouth dialect’, sheds further light upon both the extent and attitude to everyday Gaelic speech among his kinsmen in Easter Ross.²³ More generally, the two fifteenth-century cases at Colmonell in Carrick (in 1434) and Kirkcolm in Galloway (in 1486–87) re-emphasise the persistence of Gaelic amongst ordinary parishioners in the south west of Scotland into the later fifteenth century.

²² W. H. Bliss (ed.), *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Petitions to the Pope* (London, 1896), p. 530.

²³ *CSSR 1433–1447*, nos 833, 834. The Denoons were later associated with nearby Fearn Abbey. George F. Black, *The Surnames of Scotland: their origin, meaning and history* (1946; Edinburgh, 2004), pp. 205–6; W. Anderson, *The Scottish nation, or the surnames, families, literature, honours, and biographical history of the people of Scotland*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1871–77), iii, p. 704; R. J. Adam (ed.), *The Calendar of Fearn, 1471–1667*, Scottish History Society (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 79–82.



Figure 1 Language cases in Scotland

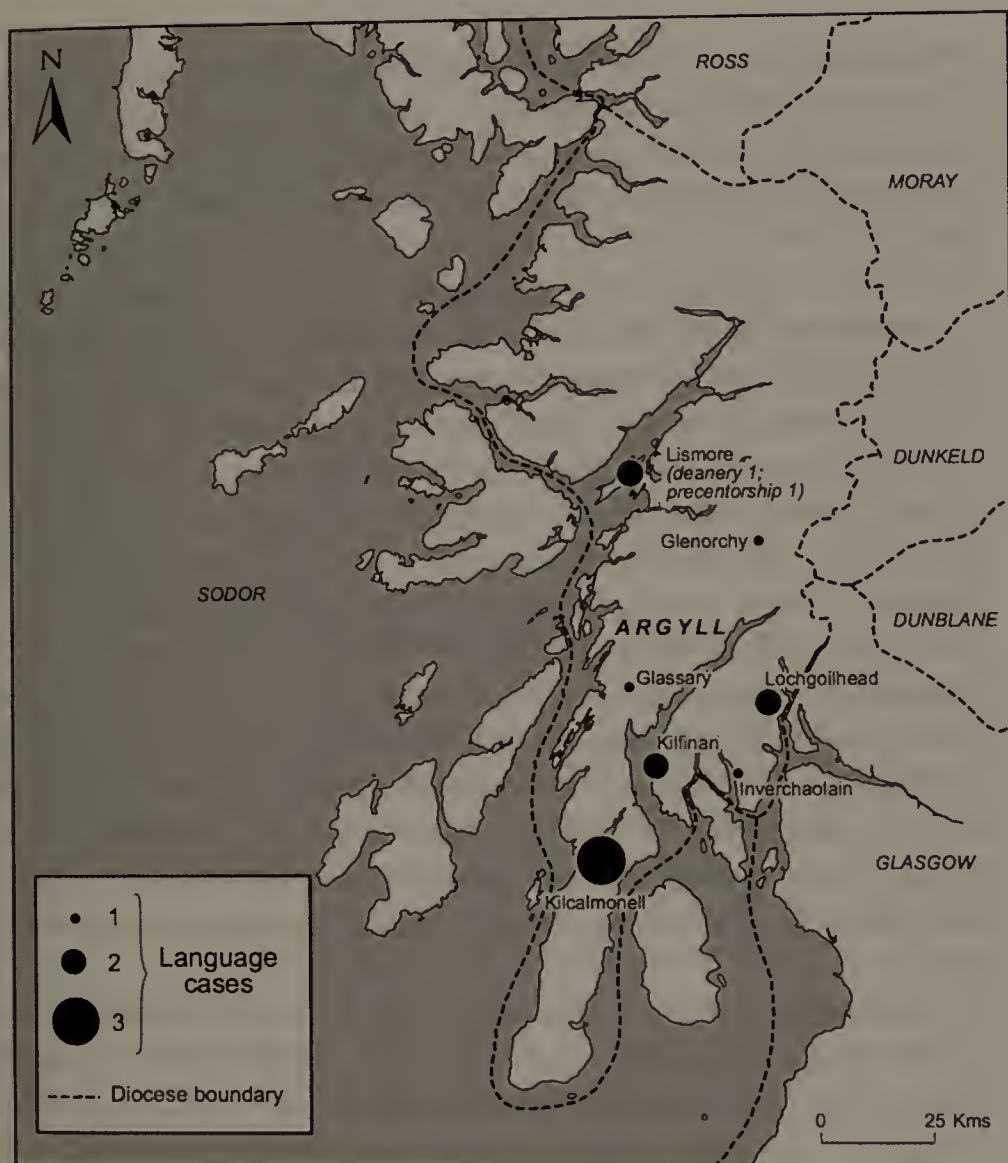


Figure 2 Language cases in Argyll

Nevertheless, the heavy preponderance of Scottish language cases were in Argyll, with some of those accused holding parishes in the ancestral heartlands of the *Gàidhealtachd*. Their significant presence here indicates that factors other than the slow retreat of Gaelic were at work. Out of the twenty Scottish cases recorded between 1366 and 1503, no less than two-thirds related to ecclesiastical benefices in Argyll between 1421 and 1498. Even by

comparison with any of the Irish dioceses, the number of language cases in Argyll is extraordinary. Most occurred during the long episcopate of George Lauder, bishop of Argyll (1427–1473) the first Lowlander (and perhaps the first non-Gaelic-speaker) to hold the post.

Lauder's appointment drastically altered the ecclesiastical landscape in Argyll. His episcopate witnessed a rapid and sudden escalation in the number of Lowland incumbents and an unprecedented stream of supplications from Lowland clerics anxious to acquire benefices in the diocese.²⁴ The bishop was responsible for a good proportion of Lowland appointments, and there is little doubt that he was the driving force behind several more supplications, especially from among kinsmen from his home diocese of St Andrews, such as James Lauder, the non-Gaelic-speaking vicar of Glenorchy.²⁵ Others appointed to Bishop Lauder's inner circle, such as Peter of Dalkeith, vicar of Lochgoilhead, and Robert Muir, dean of Argyll, were among those accused of ignorance of Gaelic. The bishop's preference for Lowland non-Gaels may give the impression that he was prejudiced, but the practice of bishops bringing in clergy from their previous centres of activity was not unusual in the middle ages.²⁶

As bishop, George Lauder was supposed to ensure that his flock received the rudiments of the faith, so why did he present or confirm the appointment of non-Gaelic-speaking clerics to offices whose *raison d'être* was to cater for the local Gaelic population? The answer lies in the limitations placed upon the bishop's ecclesiastical patronage over the local Church, which was dominated by clan

²⁴ MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen*, pp. 116–17.

²⁵ He probably collated kinsman John Lauder to the vicarage of Lochgoilhead and also Robert 'Fevyr', a pluralist Fifeshire cleric who held the bishop's old vicarage of Crail and a prebend in Argyll. *Ibid.*, appendix A, no 109; Annie I. Dunlop and Ian B. Cowan (eds), *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome, 1428–1432*, Scottish History Society (Edinburgh, 1970) [hereafter *CSSR 1428–1432*], p. 253.

²⁶ See Iain G. MacDonald, 'The attack on Bishop George Lauder of Argyll in the Auchinleck Chronicle' *IR* 61.2 (2010), 111–36, at p. 119.

chiefs and appropriating religious institutions. As Andrew Barrell has argued, these linguistic quarrels were essentially disputes for supremacy over the local Church, fought between the bishop and the local nobility and ultimately rooted in the exceptionally poor rights and resources available to the bishop.²⁷ The cathedral dignitaries were in the gift of lay patronage, which meant that he could not readily use these offices to reward his servants and administrators, so he sought to intrude fellow Lowlanders into parochial benefices against the wishes of the local lay patron.²⁸

This action was not unprecedented. Bishop Lauder's predecessors had earlier resorted to drastic steps in their struggle against lay patronage and poverty, and incurred the wrath of the native magnates. During the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries local Gaelic bishops of Argyll faced long-running litigious disputes against Clan Donald over the annexations of the church of Kilmonivaig in Lochaber to the deanery and (latterly) bishopric of Argyll.²⁹ Abortive attempts by Bishop Beathán MacGill-Anndrais (1397–1411x1420) to deprive the rector of Kilmelfort and annex the church to the cathedral chapter were blocked in part by the incumbent's close association with the lay patrons, the Campbell lords of Lochawe.³⁰ Indeed, the illegal occupation of the vicarage of Kilbride by Bishop MacGill-Anndrais for several years before his death, encapsulates the episcopate's chronic financial problems.³¹ During the 1430s and 1440s these disputes between bishop and

²⁷ Barrell, 'Church in the West Highlands', pp. 27–8.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 28–30.

²⁹ CPP, 573, 638; Francis McGurk (ed.), *Calendar of Papal Letters to Scotland of Benedict XIII of Avignon 1394–1419*, Scottish History Society (Edinburgh, 1976), pp. 55–6, 141, 194, 240–1.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 125–6, 212, 214–5, 243. For this association, see Steve Boardman, 'The Campbells and charter lordship in medieval Argyll', in Steve Boardman and Alasdair Ross (eds), *The Exercise of Power in Medieval Scotland, c.1200–1500*, (Dublin, 2003), 95–117, at p. 116 and n.66.

³¹ Annie I. Dunlop (ed.), *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome, 1423–1428*, Scottish History Society (Edinburgh, 1956) [hereafter CSSR 1423–1428], p. 79

patron re-emerged with a renewed intensity, but were now overlaid by complaints about language.

The Royal Agenda

The appointments of non-Gaels required strong political will to support them, and some could not have succeeded without James I's active political interest in Argyll and the western seaboard.³² Some of this has already been briefly touched upon by Steve Boardman, who argues that two of the language cases – at Glenorchy and Lochgoilhead in 1441 – represented a Clan Campbell 'backlash' against the earlier outside interference by James I and Bishop Lauder.³³ Indeed, there is little doubt that several appointments, not least that of Bishop Lauder himself, were heavily influenced, if not pre-determined, by James I's efforts to secure the loyalty of Clan Campbell and Clan Donald. Argyll was a potentially treacherous region for the crown during the 1420s and 1430s, and Lauder was parachuted into the bishopric by James I after his predecessor (Finlay of Albany) fled following the failed Albany-Stewart rebellion against the king in May 1425. The king's fears were for a time heightened by the presence of James the Fat, a rival claimant for the throne who, until his death in 1429, resided in Antrim under the protection of Clann Eoin Mhóir, the most senior branch of Clan Donald.³⁴ James' role is implied in the supplication against the incumbent of Lochgoilhead in 1441 which, while blaming 'Bishop George of Argyll' for intruding a non-Gaelic-speaking priest against the 'true' patron's wishes, nevertheless acknowledged that it was

³² Boardman, *Campbells*, pp. 126–9.

³³ Stephen I. Boardman, "'Pillars of the Community': Campbell lordship and architectural patronage in the fifteenth century", in Richard Oram and Geoffrey Stell (eds), *Lordship and Architecture in Medieval and Renaissance Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2005), 122–59, at pp. 132–3, 138.

³⁴ Michael Brown, *James I* (East Linton, 1994), pp. 64–5; Simon Kingston, *Ulster and the Isles in the Fifteenth Century: The lordship of the Clann Domhnaill of Antrim* (Dublin, 2004), p. 68.

effected ‘by the secular power’.³⁵ This was characteristic of James I’s approach towards church offices, and echoes other allegations of aggressive interference made against him elsewhere after his death.³⁶

Bishop Lauder is not mentioned in the petition concerning Glenorchy on 2 August 1441, but it seems probable he influenced the presentation of his likely kinsman James Lauder to the vicarage.³⁷ Both Lochgoilhead and Glenorchy lay in the patronage of the Campbell lords of Lochawe who were close allies of the old Albany-Stewart regime. There is strong evidence to conclude that the motivating force behind both petitions was Donnchadh Campbell, lord of Lochawe, who just three days later asked the pope to confirm the annexation of these two churches as prebends for his newly-erected collegiate church at Kilmun.³⁸

The identity of some of the ecclesiastics involved strengthens the Campbells’ role. The suppliant for Glenorchy, Muireadhach mac Phàdraig mac Ealair, probably belonged to a branch of the MacKellar kindred in northern Lochawe who were closely associated with Campbell lordship.³⁹ Donnchadh Campbell’s close kinsman Dubhghall of Lochawe, archdeacon of Argyll, was at the papal curia throughout the latter half of 1441, where he openly accused Bishop Lauder of trying to remove him from his office in favour of Peter of Dalkeith, the non-Gaelic-speaking vicar of Lochgoilhead.⁴⁰ Although Dubhghall did not himself frame any of his own supplications around the language issue, he did pay annates for Glenorchy and Lochgoilhead upon their annexation to Kilmun on 5 October 1441, and presumably delivered the supplications in person.⁴¹ When viewed in this context, it seems perfectly clear that

³⁵ *CSSR 1433–1447*, nos 787, 823.

³⁶ Brown, *James I*, p. 124.

³⁷ *CSSR 1433–1447*, no. 787.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 791.

³⁹ MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen*, p. 159, see n. 250.

⁴⁰ *CSSR 1433–1447*, nos 782, 789, 797, 800, 806.

⁴¹ A. I. Cameron (ed.), *The Apostolic Camera and Scottish Benefices 1418–88* (Oxford, 1934), pp. 129–30; Boardman, ‘Pillars of the Community’, p. 137.

these language petitions were simply one aspect within a much wider game of rivalry between the Campbells and Bishop Lauder that had originated during the reign of James I.

The 'secular arm' that secured Peter of Dalkeith at Lochgoilhead may have also been responsible for the appointment of another incumbent in Kilcalmonell parish. This parish lay in the traditionally Stewart lordship of Knapdale, part of which had been acquired by the lords of the Isles, and it bordered their lordship of Kintyre.⁴² However, between 1430 and 1432 the vicarage was in the hands of non-Gaelic-speaking John Arous, the queen's secretary. His possession of the benefice is probably tied to a royal expedition in 1430 which captured the nearby castles of Sween and Skipness in Knapdale from Clan Donald.⁴³ The precise detail of his appointment is unclear, for Kilcalmonell lay in the patronage of Paisley Abbey. However, Arous' connections with the royal household probably indicates that James I either ignored or leaned upon the abbot of Paisley to rubber stamp the appointment as part of his strategy to recover control over his principality of the Stewartry.

It is tempting to suggest that this was also a manifestation of James I's own insecurities about the recent threat of an Albany-Stewart restoration backed by Clann Eoin Mhóir. Indeed, Bishop Lauder appointed at least four of his own candidates to benefices lying in the Kintyre peninsula during the late 1420s and 1430s, often without the consent of the 'true' patron, Alasdair, lord of the Isles.⁴⁴ Yet none of the complaints against these incumbents cited language as a reason for deprivation, while two of the three clerics Bishop Lauder presented to benefices in Clan Donald patronage were

⁴² J. Munro and R. W. Munro (eds), *Acts of the Lords of the Isles, 1336-1493*, Scottish History Society (Edinburgh, 1986) [hereafter *ALI*], pp. xxvi-xxvii, 218-221; J.G. Dunbar and A.A.M. Duncan, 'Tarbert Castle: A contribution to the history of Argyll', *Scottish Historical Review* 50 (1971), 1-17, at p. 6. Contemporary supplications typically referred to the parish as Kilcalmonell 'in Knapdale'.

⁴³ *CPL*, viii, p. 470; *CSSR 1428-1432*, p. 240; Brown, *James I*, p. 135.

⁴⁴ *CPL*, viii, pp. 375, 468, 597-98, 607; *CSSR 1433-1447*, nos 307, 307-8, 309, 314b.

actually of Gaelic origin: Dubhghall mac Ghille-Chrìost mhic Labhruinn, rector of Kilmichael, and Muireadhach mac Dhubhghaill MacNeill, prebendary of Kilcolmkill. Although the political support necessary to enable non-Gaelic appointments was probably less forthcoming in Kintyre,⁴⁵ this suggests that Bishop Lauder's recruitment policies were not simply determined by antipathy towards Gaelic clergy, but rather by a desire to reassert the clergies' duty of loyalty to their bishop rather than the local nobility.

The preponderance of other non-Gaelic appointments in Argyll were concentrated in regions that were to some degree politically and ecclesiastically aligned with the Lowlands. This could be because Bishop Lauder regarded these benefices as most accessible to the Firth of Clyde and thereby more receptive to Lowland influence.⁴⁶ Indeed, several of these benefices were in the gift of individuals and institutions situated in the English-speaking Lowlands. The barony and church of Glassary had since c.1374 belonged to the Scrymgeour constables of Dundee, while the churches of Kilcalmonell and Kilfinan, and Inverchaolain, all lay within the Stewartry and pertained to Paisley Abbey and the Trinitarian house of Fail in Ayrshire respectively.⁴⁷ It could be significant that both Paisley and Fail were Stewart foundations. One might speculate that the monarchy, itself largely bereft of presentational powers elsewhere in Argyll, leaned upon them to approve ordinary appointments of non-Gaelic-speaking incumbents in the vicarages of Kilfinan (in 1454 and 1467) and Inverchaolain

⁴⁵ The details of control over Kintyre after 1430 are fuzzier than Knapdale. Note, however, the short-lived provision of James Douglas, clerk of the diocese of St Andrews, by Bishop Lauder to the canonry and prebend of Kilcolmkill in Kintyre, sometime before May 1430(-1). Douglas was not accused of ignorance of Gaelic, though the delator was himself a Lowlander. See MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen*, pp. 89, 301.

⁴⁶ Barrell, 'Church in the West Highlands', p. 29.

⁴⁷ R.W. Munro and J. Munro, *The Scrimgeours and their Chiefs: Scotland's Royal Banner Bearers* (Edinburgh, 1980), pp. 27-32; Ian B. Cowan, *The Parishes of Medieval Scotland*, Scottish Record Society (Edinburgh, 1967), pp. 88, 96, 100.

(1484). This would not only bolster the bishop's presentational powers, but would strengthen royal control over Cowal. This region was then enjoying an economic boom from the fishing trade, but one which was also becoming increasingly vulnerable to the alarmingly expansionist Campbell lordship.⁴⁸

In terms of presentation, political ties seem to have been more important than ecclesiastical ties with the Lowlands. Kilkerran parish church also pertained to Paisley Abbey, but it was never the subject of such collations, probably because Kintyre remained outside the Lowland sphere of political influence during the fifteenth century. Moreover, no cases were ever recorded in any of the other Argyll churches appropriated to Lowland religious houses. This, together with the absence of complaints regarding the numerous lowland ecclesiastics found in Gaelic-speaking Arran and Bute (which both pertained to the Stewartry), strengthens the belief that political rather than ethnic or pastoral concerns guided the collation of non-Gaelic-speaking clerics.⁴⁹ The complaints about language usually emerged where the political control of a region (and by extension the ecclesiastical patronage of its benefices) was in dispute.

The dispensations acquired by the non-Gaelic-speaking vicars of Kilfinan in 1454 and 1467 were probably chiefly motivated by pressure from the local lord, Eoin Lamont. In 1465 Lamont unsuccessfully supplicated the papacy to restore to his family the patronage of Kilfinan and Inverchaolain from Paisley Abbey and the convent of Fail, respectively.⁵⁰ He based his argument upon the alleged illegality of the original grant rather than the unsuitability of the present incumbents. Lamont's unhappiness was probably grounded in his own inability to make appointments to benefices

⁴⁸ Boardman, *Campbells*, pp. 141–2, 173–4.

⁴⁹ MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen*, p. 121. The absence of complaints from Arran and Bute is interesting as Clann Eoin Mhóir also sought to impose their lordship over these islands. There are, however, complaints regarding nearby Kilcalmonell. See pp. 15–16 below.

⁵⁰ *CSSR 1447–1471*, no. 1025.

which could be used as salaries for kinsmen or clerics in his service. The fact that the clergy who were favoured were not his choices was probably of greater importance than their inability to speak the vernacular. Language was an issue secondary to the key motivation: control of patronage of the local Church and its benefices.⁵¹

These issues of noble patronage and lordship may have also underlain further language supplications delivered against the incumbents of the vicarage of Kilcalmonell in June 1450 and April 1498. The two plaintiffs were probably a father and son from the Omay (Gaelic *Ó Miadhaigh*) family, an ecclesiastical lineage that monopolised the prebend of Kilberry in nearby Knapdale during the sixteenth century.⁵² There is no direct evidence establishing a kin or client relationship with any major clan, and nothing to tie them to any conscious political strategy from the neighbouring Clan Donald lordship. However, the contextual evidence is illuminating. Since the 1430s Clan Donald influence (or more precisely that of Clann Eoin Mhóir and its sub-branches) had spread from Kintyre across Kilbrannan Sound into northern Arran, where kinsmen were still occupying nominally royal estates in the early 1450s. In 1452 a Clan Donald fleet led by Domhnall Balloch, chief of the Clann Eoin Mhóir, raided Arran and other islands in the Clyde estuary in response to fresh royal attempts to enforce its lordship over the island.⁵³ Bishop Turnbull of Glasgow, who led these efforts initially, actually knew the incumbent of Kilcalmonell – Patrick Cornton – personally, although his direct involvement with Arran did not begin until several months after the supplication.⁵⁴ The decision of the abbot of Paisley to seek confirmation of their possession of Kilcalmonell and Kilkerran from Eoin, lord of the Isles, three years

⁵¹ Interestingly, in 1484 the vicar of Inverchaolain would later face deprivation on grounds of defect of dialect. *CPL*, xiii, p. 172.

⁵² *CPL*, x, p. 493; xvi, no. 869; MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen*, pp. 154–55, 317, 319–20.

⁵³ Boardman, *Campbells*, pp. 152–3, 181–3.

⁵⁴ John Durkan and James Kirk, *The University of Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1977), pp. 7–8, 9.

later in 1455 indicates that their rights were under some kind of threat, perhaps in part because leading clansmen already perceived that Paisley were misusing their rights to support a royalist agenda in Argyll.⁵⁵

The supplication of 1498, on the other hand, followed in the wake of the forfeiture of Clan Donald in 1493 and coincided with an energetic phase of royal planning to establish an infrastructure with which to control the Kintyre peninsula. James IV was determined to improve financial returns from the newly acquired lands of the lordship and particularly from Kintyre.⁵⁶ He personally travelled to the peninsula three times in 1498, where he placed the recently repaired castles of Tarbert and Skipness – which both lay in Kilcalmonell parish – directly under royal control.⁵⁷

Direct corroborative proof is scarce, but given the contextual circumstances of both cases, one might tentatively speculate that some individuals within or associated with the Clan Donald lordship were following the example of the Campbells of Lochawe. They had employed language as a lever to help uproot beneficed incumbents as part of a wider strategy to consolidate or reacquire control of their own Argyll estates or to tighten their grip over those of neighbouring lords.

Language petitions in mid-fifteenth century Argyll do seem to have been intimately tied to contemporary politics, but does the pattern replicate itself in language petitions further north? The parish rectory of Creich in Sutherland was the subject of a language supplication in July 1444, and it too was of strategic importance. The parish winded its way along the northern border of the earldom of Ross from the east coast through into Assynt, and control of it would have been important to Alasdair, lord of the Isles, especially during his fight with James I to secure official recognition of his right to the earldom in the late 1420s and early 1430s. That the king

⁵⁵ *ALI*, pp. 86–7.

⁵⁶ MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen*, pp. 77–78, 97–98.

⁵⁷ N. MacDougall, *James IV*, (East Linton, 1997), pp. 104–5, 116.

had himself intervened to act as immediate superior over these lands in March 1430 underlines its significance during this period. However, by the time of the supplication these difficulties had passed, with Alasdair well established as earl of Ross and serving as royal Justiciar of the North.⁵⁸ It is difficult to detect a lordship agenda. Both the ecclesiastics involved were close relations of the lord of the Isles and it is impossible to determine any partisan involvement. The plaintiff, ‘John Kennochson’, was the son of Alasdair MacKenzie of Kintail (fl. c.1430–c.1476) and cousin to Eoin, lord of the Isles.⁵⁹ The defendant, John Innes, was subdean of Ross and the son of Walter Innes, the ‘beloved cousin’ of Alasdair, lord of the Isles.⁶⁰ Innes had only won possession of the benefice in 1438, after Alasdair had officially acceded to the earldom. Thus, rather than reflecting the aspirations of the new earl of Ross to capitalise on the weak minority regime, this supplication might be better understood as a private initiative, albeit at a time when language was a ‘hot’ issue in Scottish ecclesiastical circles.

Andrew of Denoon’s successful long reign as archdeacon of Sodor between 1441 and 1456 must have owed something to the ties

⁵⁸ P. G. B. McNeill and H. L. MacQueen (eds), *Atlas of Scottish History to 1707* (Edinburgh, 1996), 356, 442; John Maitland Thomson et al. (eds), *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum*, 11 vols (Edinburgh, 1882–1914) [hereafter *RMS*], ii, no. 147; *ALI*, pp. 31, 130–2; Cosmo Innes et al. (eds), *Origines Parochiales Scotiae*, 2 vols in 3, Bannatyne Club (Edinburgh, 1851–5), ii, pt ii, p. 686 and n. 5.

⁵⁹ *CSSR 1433–1447*, no. 1044; A. MacCoinnich, ‘Kingis Rabellis to Cuidich an Righ? Clann Choinnich: the emergence of a kindred’, in Boardman and Ross (eds), *The Exercise of Power in Medieval Scotland*, 175–200, at pp. 179, 187. Although he occurs in 1455 as ‘Johannes Kenniti’ the latter name denotes the Scots family name *Kennethson*, rather than a patronymic. Alasdair MacKenzie of Kintail appears as ‘Alexandrus Kennathsoun’ in 1430. *RMS*, ii, nos. 179, 1404; Black, *Surnames*, p. 393. Many thanks to Aonghas MacCoinnich for discussing this individual with me. For more, see Aonghas MacCoinnich, ‘*Tùs gu Iar-lachd, Eachdraidh Clann Choinnich*, c.1466–c.1637’ (*Tràchdas* PhD, *Oilthigh Obar Dheathain*, 2004), pp. 83–94 and n. 286, p. 125.

⁶⁰ Duncan Forbes of Culloden, ‘Ane account of the origine and succession of the familie of Innes, gathered from authentick wreats’, in Cosmo Innes (ed.), *Ane Account of the Familie of Innes*, Spalding Club, (Aberdeen, 1864), 1–44, at pp. 14–15; *Fasti*, pp. 80, 86, 366.

which his family in Easter Ross had cultivated with earl Alasdair, and suggests a pragmatic approach to ecclesiastical preferment on the latter's part, and in which the candidate's language playing little or no role.⁶¹ However, these connections did not protect Denoon from a litigious campaign by Aonghas mac Eoin *de Insulis*, brother of Domhnall Balloch, over the archdeaconry in 1456. As with the case of Peter of Dalkeith discussed earlier, the focus of attack was not upon Denoon's inability to speak Gaelic (which he admitted in 1441), but rather his status as a 'concubinary, public fornicator and dilapidator of goods' of his office.⁶² Indeed, the ferocity of Aonghas's legal action poses questions about the disposal of premium ecclesiastical offices at the expense of local Hebridean clergy. Could it perhaps be an indication of emerging divisions within Clan Donald over the ruling family's disposal of land and property to other kindreds at the expense of their own kinsmen?⁶³ In any case, highlighting language was merely a means to an end for Denoon and Kennochson in their quest for livings. Both men belonged to an elite group of ecclesiastics from Ross-shire and the West Highlands and Islands that were exploiting new opportunities under the aegis of the expanded lordship of Clan Donald.⁶⁴

⁶¹ *ALI*, pp. 104, 171–2.

⁶² *CPL*, ix, pp. 152–53; *CSSR 1447–1471*, nos 588, 598. Possibly he had learnt in the interim?

⁶³ Hugh Macdonald (attributed), 'History of the MacDonalds', in J. R. N. MacPhail (ed.), *Highland Papers*, 4 vols, Scottish History Society (Edinburgh, 1914–34), i. 6–72, at p. 47; Norman Macdougall, 'Achilles' Heel? The Earldom of Ross, the Lordship of the Isles, and the Stewart Kings, 1449–1507', in E. J. Cowan and R. Andrew McDonald (eds), *Alba: Celtic Scotland in the Medieval Era* (2000: Edinburgh, 2005) 248–75, at pp. 255–8.

⁶⁴ He also supplicated for the rectory of Eye in Lewis and the sub-precentorship of Ross around this time, before becoming treasurer of Ross in 1454. *CSSR 1433–1447*, nos 776, 778, 1058; *Fasti*, p. 364. For further ecclesiastics, see *CSSR 1447–1471*, nos 346, 593.

Kinship and the Campbells

While there remain strong grounds for caution about tying Clan Donald closely with certain supplications, there is little doubt about the role of the leading figures of Clan Campbell, although remarkably few scholars have recognised the pioneering role played by a small number of individuals among the ruling family. Cailean Campbell, lord of Lochawe, was the first person to raise the language issue within a Scottish context, when on 16 January 1366 he supplicated for the marriage of his son, Eoin to Mariota Campbell, on account of the dearth of suitable nobles in the Highlands who spoke the Gaelic tongue.⁶⁵ His son, Niall mac Chailein Campbell, archdeacon of Argyll and half-brother of Donnchadh Campbell, the next lord, was the first churchman in Scotland to seek the deprivation of an incumbent on the grounds of language when he petitioned for the rectory of Glassary on 9 March 1423.⁶⁶ The most significant supplication of all was by Donnchadh's son Cailean Campbell, lord of Glenorchy, known in tradition as Cailean *dubh na Roimh* ('Black Colin of Rome') on account of his frequent trips to Rome. On 21 March 1466 he requested that the Pope would declare that no one should receive or retain any parish church, parsonage or vicarage, in Argyll 'unless he understands and speaks intelligibly the language of the greater part of the parishioners'.⁶⁷ This supplication marked a century's association between the Campbell elite and the language issue. The Campbells of Lochawe sought to achieve considerable strategic advantages: the marriage in 1366 had added new estates to their lordship, while the attempt in 1423 to remove John Scrymgeour from the rectory of Glassary followed several decades of clan pressure upon the absentee Scrymgeour barons of Glassary, including illegal

⁶⁵ CPL, iv, p. 56. The identification of the figures in this papal letter is conjectural. See Boardman, *Campbells*, pp. 73–74, 102, 104, tables 2, 2A.

⁶⁶ CSSR 1423–1428, pp. 10–11.

⁶⁷ *Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Registra Supplicationum*, v. 592, f. 127; CSSR 1447–1471, no. 1099.

possession of lands.⁶⁸ The general prohibition sought by Cailean *dubh na Roimh* reflected the growing bullishness of a kindred pre-eminent on both the regional and national stage; in c.1458 the new chief was created first earl of Argyll, and during the 1460s he was enjoying a meteoric rise into the affairs of central government.

Despite the strictures of the 1466 indult, it seems unlikely that Clan Campbell wished to ban non-Gaelic-speaking churchmen from Argyll entirely, as they had a record of collating Lowlanders to benefices themselves. It is difficult to believe – though admittedly not impossible – that their Lowland appointments were each sufficiently expert to minister in the Gaelic vernacular.⁶⁹ Many doubtless spent their energies engaged in administrative clan business rather than in local pastoral affairs. The 1466 indult was nonetheless a useful weapon to strengthen Campbell superiority over the local Church and to dispute or ignore any undesirable episcopal appointments. Its influence is not to be found in the number of beneficed Lowland clergy in Argyll (which continued to grow), but in later supplications regarding non-Gaelic-speaking clergy, which indicate that the general prohibition was subsequently added the cathedral statute book.⁷⁰ What unites these supplications is their expansionist agenda; each helped to protect or augment the territorial integrity of Campbell lordship.

Language and lordship beyond Argyll

Further linguistic complaints emerge in other regions where Clan Campbell had established or were consolidating their lordship. In Galloway, Raibeart Campbell filed accusations of defect of dialect against John Brown, vicar of Kirkcolm in Galloway, in 1486 and

⁶⁸ Boardman, *Campbells*, pp. 125–26; Munro and Munro, *Scrimgeours*, p. 29; Colin M. MacDonald, *The History of Argyll up to the beginning of the Sixteenth Century* (Glasgow, 1951), p. 198.

⁶⁹ MacDonald, *Clerics and Clansmen*, pp. 117–18.

⁷⁰ James Kirk, Roland Tanner and Alan MacQuarrie (eds), *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome, 1471–1492* (unpublished, 1997) [hereafter *CSSR 1471–1492*], no. 1005; *CPL*, xiii, p. 172; xvii, part ii, no. 53.

1487.⁷¹ Located on the Rhinns of Galloway, Kirkcolm parish lay within the lordship of Corsewall, which belonged to an offshoot of the Campbells of Loudoun in Ayrshire since at least 1426 and throughout the fifteenth century.⁷² Raibeart Campbell, who presumably belonged to one of these lineages,⁷³ was closely associated with Eoin Campbell, archdeacon of Argyll and the son of Colin *dubh na Roimh*, lord of Glenorchy.⁷⁴ Both men were together in Rome in early 1487, when Raibeart received provision to Eoin’s office upon the latter’s promotion to the see of Sodor.⁷⁵ Patronage was again the underlying motivation for the supplication, as the patrons, Sweetheart Abbey, were allegedly draining the parochial revenues and acting beyond their authority. Brown was accused of conspiring with the abbot to treat the benefice as a vicar pensionary (thereby uplifting all the tithes) when it was customarily treated as a perpetual vicarage, with a portion assigned to the incumbent.⁷⁶

The growing power of the Campbells of Glenorchy in the Gaelic regions of Dunkeld diocese may also help explain why John

⁷¹ *CSSR 1471–1492*, nos 1259, 1279; *CPL*, xiv, pp. 192–3. The church occurs as ‘Kyzkerin’, ‘Kirkchum’ and ‘Kirkcun’ leading the editors of the papal volumes to suggest Kirkcowan and Kirkennan (Buittle) as alternatives. However, Kirkcolm was the only church annexed to Sweetheart Abbey which lay within the conjectured zone of Gaelic speech in 1400. See Cowan, *Parishes*, pp. 23, 119; *Atlas of Scottish History*, 427.

⁷² *RMS*, ii, nos 183, 185, 1471; R. C. Reid (ed.), *Wigtownshire Charters*, Scottish History Society (Edinburgh, 1960), pp. 165, 174 and note, 198–99.

⁷³ The forname Robert was popular amongst Loudon Campbells. See *RMS*, ii, nos. 1630, 2354, 2846, 3622. For probable examples of Robert from the Campbells of Corsewell see *RMS*, ii, no. 1884; *Wigtownshire Charters*, p. 227.

⁷⁴ Boardman, *Campbells*, p. 341, n. 74.

⁷⁵ *CPL*, xiv, p. 54. See also J. Dowden, *The Bishops of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1912), p. 290.

⁷⁶ This accusation may have the ring of truth, for Sweetheart Abbey’s rights over Kirkcolm were the subject of a supplication to Rome in 1449. John Brown himself could be an early member of the Brown kindred that supplied a succession of abbots of Sweetheart in the sixteenth century. *CSSR 1447–1471*, no. 291; F. J. Stewart and R. C. Reid, ‘The Early Browns of Newabbey’, *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, third series, xxxvii (1960), 93–110.

Duncanson ('Duncani') sought the security of a language dispensation when he petitioned to acquire the parish church of Weem in 1503. Duncanson's dispensation appears initially to be reflective of the ecclesiastical measures adopted by Bishop George Brown of Dunkeld (1483–1515) to cater for his Gaelic flock. According to Brown's biographer and contemporary Alexander Myln, canon of Dunkeld, the bishop's policies were wide-ranging, including the creation of new parishes and the promotion of Gaelic-speaking clergy to senior offices, as well as the employment of Gaelic-speaking friars to preach and hear confessions annually in the upper regions of his diocese.⁷⁷ However, language was never raised as an issue in any of the earlier litigation filed by Duncanson or the various other Lowland clergymen, some of whom were supported by the earl of Atholl and the Menzies laird of Weem, who were engaged in a long-standing rivalry over the patronage of Weem parish church.⁷⁸ The dispensation could be recognition of the emerging political supremacy of Campbell lordship over Weem, Breadalbane and Taymouth, and accentuated by the likely involvement of Donnchadh Campbell, lord of Glenorchy, in aggressive activities associated with the siege and destruction of the laird of Weem's residence in September 1502. This action had itself been prompted by an arbitrary intervention from James IV that had destroyed the

⁷⁷ R. K. Hannay (ed.), *Rentale Dunkeldense*, Scottish History Society (Edinburgh, 1915), pp. 304, 313; J. MacQueen, 'Alexander Myln, Bishop George Brown, and the Chapter of Dunkeld', in J. Kirk (ed.), *Humanism and Reform: The Church in Europe, England, and Scotland, 1400–1643: essays in honour of James K. Cameron* (Oxford, 1991), 349–60, at p. 359.

⁷⁸ The dispute probably originated to the forfeiture of the earldom of Atholl in 1437, following which the Menzies chiefs were no longer vassals to the earls in Weem and certain other lands. *SHS Misc. IV*, pp. 355–6; *Reports of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts: Sixth Report* (London, 1877) pp. 690–92, nos 1, 5, 6, 9, 11, 20, 22–27. See also Martin D. W. MacGregor, 'A Political History of the MacGregors before 1571', (University of Edinburgh, unpublished PhD thesis, 1989), pp. 178–182.

local political settlement.⁷⁹ In 1496 one of Myln’s fellow cathedral canons, Alexander Moncreiff, had also unsuccessfully tried win the precentorship of Lismore – an office in Glenorchy patronage – through a dispensation for defect of dialect.⁸⁰ Given this context it is tempting to speculate that the Glenorchy Campbells’ prominent association with the issue helped arouse Bishop Brown’s reputed pastoral concern for his Gaelic parishioners.

These examples, while demonstrating the longevity of the association between the Campbells and defect of dialect in Scotland, underline the inseparability of Church and lordship.

Another accusation made in March 1434 against the non-Gaelic-speaking vicar of Colmonell in Ayrshire, reinforces the lordship connection.⁸¹ The incumbent was an otherwise obscure figure named Nicholas Wan, but the delator, Pàdraig ‘MacKawe’, belonged to the local MacCaw family of Fardenreoch in Colmonell parish, vassals of the Gaelic-speaking Kennedys, who were heavily associated with

⁷⁹ Steve Boardman, ‘Royal Finance and Regional Rebellion in the Reign of James IV’, in Julian Goordare and Alasdair A. MacDonald (eds), *Sixteenth-Century Scotland: Essays in Honour of Michael Lynch* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 15–41; Stephen I. Boardman, ‘Politics and the Feud in Late Medieval Scotland’ (University of St Andrews, unpublished PhD thesis, 1989), pp. 377–415. The Campbells had effectively controlled a detached portion of Weem parish since c.1478. *Acta Dominorum Auditorum: The acts of the Lords Auditors of causes and complaints, 1466–1494* (London, 1839), pp. 73, 87; MacGregor, ‘MacGregors’, pp. 148–9, and n. 64.

⁸⁰ *CPL*, xvii, part ii, no. 53. Moncreiff was one of the canons to whom Alexander Myln dedicated his work. Alexandro Myln, *Vitae Dvnkeldensis Ecclesiae Episcoporum, a prima sedis fyndatione, ad annum MDXV*, Bannatyne Club (Edinburgh, 1823), p. 2.

⁸¹ *CSSR 1433–1447*, no. 124.

this church in the later fifteenth century.⁸² The Kennedys had been experiencing a great period of uncertainty and internal feuding regarding the headship of the kindred and the bailieship of Carrick, culminating in the arrest of John Kennedy of Dunure and Cassillis by James I in 1431.⁸³ The details as always remain frustratingly unclear, but the context mirrors the conditions of several other cases of defect of dialect in Argyll: they typically concerned churches that were customarily associated with local Gaelic nobility that had recently suffered severe disruption, loss of lands or arrest because of an aggressive royal intervention.⁸⁴

⁸² 'Henricus M'Cawis' witnessed a charter at Colmonell church in 1485, while in 1505 Ferdinrevoch was held by the Kennedys of Bargany. *RMS*, ii, nos 1639, 2899. 'Gilbertus Kenyde' was parish clerk of Colmonell before 1477 and a 'Gilbertus Kennedie' was vicar in 1548. *Registrum Episcopatus Glasguensis*, 2 vols, Maitland Club (Edinburgh, 1843), ii, pp. 435–6; F. C. Hunter Blair (ed.), *Charters of the Abbey of Crosraguel*, 2 vols, Ayrshire and Galloway Archaeological Association (Edinburgh, 1886), i, p. 113. For Kennedy lands in Colmonell parish see *RMS*, ii, no. 1010. There was also a MacCaw landholding family on Bute (Black, *Surnames*, p. 467), but this seems a less likely origin.

⁸³ He remained incarcerated in Stirling before escaping into exile, but the last recorded year of his imprisonment – 1434 – was the same year as the supplication. J. Stuart et al. (eds), *The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland*, 23 vols (Edinburgh, 1878–1908), iv, p. 591; Felix J. H. Skene (ed.), *Liber Pluscardensis*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1877–80), i, p. 377; ii, p. 284. Brown, *James I*, pp. 125–8, 133–4; Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*, (eds) D. E. R. Watt et al., 9 vols (Aberdeen, 1987–98), ix, p. 265. See H. L. MacQueen, 'The Kin of Kennedy, 'Kenkynnol, and the Common Law, in A. Grant and K. J. Stringer (eds), *Medieval Scotland: Crown, Lordship and Community: Essays presented to G. W. S. Barrow* (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 274–96; H. L. MacQueen, 'Survival and success: the Kennedys of Dunure', in *The Exercise of Power in Medieval Scotland*, pp. 67–94.

⁸⁴ John's uncle, Thomas Kennedy of Kirkoswald, claimed the Kennedy patrimony in the 1430s. In 1429 he and the other uncles had granted lands, including the barony of Ardstinchar, to John and his brothers. Perhaps the supplication was motivated by Thomas' desire to reassert control over John's properties following the latter's forfeiture? *RMS*, ii, no. 128; MacQueen, 'Survival and Success', pp. 87–88.

External and Internal Influences

Within the wider context, there are also indications that the machinery of the papal curia and the constitutions enacted by individual popes to modify its operation could also influence supplicants. This certainly seems to be true of the three Scottish cases concerning language in 1366. Andrew Barrell has observed that Pope Urban V (1362–1370) moderated the number of provision to aliens (i.e. foreign clergy who were typically absentee) during his pontificate because he was concerned that provisors were unable to speak the language of the common people in the area where their benefice was situated.⁸⁵ None of Urban's apostolic constitutions explicitly mentioned the necessity of preaching in the vernacular, but the period between 1362 and 1369 witnessed an intensive flurry of petitions concerning language to the curia in Avignon from clergy throughout Latin Christendom.⁸⁶ Certainly, the suggestion would accord with Urban's reputation for appointing the most suitable priests to benefices. This probably gives us a better explanation for Cailean Campbell's reference to the 'diversity of dialects between the highlands ... and the lowlands', in the marriage dispensation of January 1366.⁸⁷ Scholars have often pointed to this supplication as evidence of an emerging consciousness of the Highland-Lowland divide, but it was more reflective of the concurrent trend in the curia for language-based supplications than it was of the realities of marriage-alliances between the Gaelic and non-Gaelic nobility in Scotland.

⁸⁵ A. D. M. Barrell, *The Papacy, Scotland and Northern England, 1342–1378* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 90–1.

⁸⁶ Some fourteen cases occur in Urban's letters. See above, note 3. Three Welsh cases also occur in the spring of 1366. *CPP*, pp. 516, 519; *CPL*, iv, p. 25. The fact that none occur during the pontificate of his successor Gregory XI (1370–1378) supports the notion that this was chiefly a concern of Urban V. See also Patrick Zutshi, 'Petitions to the Pope in the Fourteenth Century', in W. Mark Ormrod, Gwilym Dodd and Anthony Musson (eds), *Medieval Petitions: Grace and Grievance* (Woodbridge, 2009), 82–98, at pp. 92–3 and n. 56.

⁸⁷ *CPL*, iv, p. 56.

Urban's policies also help explain why 'John Wasil', chancellor of Caithness, felt obliged to resign his prebend of Rogart if he obtained a canonry in Moray, especially as he was 'ignorant for the most part of the language of the people of that part'.⁸⁸ Further promulgations were issued by Gregory XI (1370–1378) and Benedict XIII (1394–1418) declaring papal provisions to parish churches invalid unless the supplicant could understand the local language, but these did not coincide with cases in Scotland.⁸⁹ However, the supplications in the 1430s and 1440s may have been influenced by Eugenius IV's (1431–1447) decision to reissue the constitutions and to further decree that no-one could obtain an expectative grace for outside one's own nation (*nation*) unless he could understand the language (*ydioma*).⁹⁰ Indeed, Andrew of Denoon explicitly referred to the 'constitution promulgated by the Pope' regarding preaching and 'other public acts' when he requested a dispensation for defect of dialect in his supplication for the archdeaconry of Sodor in November 1441.⁹¹

Supplications on this theme were liable to produce a snowballing effect, prompting similar requests from elsewhere. This certainly appears to have been the case in Avignon during the 1360s, though the fact that the first three Scottish requests in 1366 arrived in the same year the Statutes of Kilkenny were passed in Dublin may

⁸⁸ *CPP*, p. 528. Rogart was the prebend attached to the chancellorship, but it is quite possible that another prebend was intended, especially as he was still chancellor in 1371. *Fasti*, p. 89.

⁸⁹ E. von Ottenthal, *Regulae Cancellariae Apostolicae* (1888; Innsbruck, 2006), p. 40, no. 71; p. 136, no. 75. Alexander V (1409–1410) wrote that, with the exception of those concerning cardinals, apostolic letters obtained by anyone for expectative graces and benefices with cure (*beneficia curata*) outside of his own idiom (*extra suum proprium ydioma*) were invalid. *Ibid.*, p. 168, no. 24.

⁹⁰ 'Item voluit quod nullus extra suam nationem, nisi ydioma intelligat, gratiam expectativam impetret, alias gratia sit nulla'. Ottenthal, *Regulae Cancellariae Apostolicae*, p. 243, no. 32; p. 247, no. 63.

⁹¹ As an abbreviator of apostolic letters, Denoon was appreciative of the need to frame his petition in order to win a positive outcome. *CSSR 1433–1447*, nos 803, 834; *CPL*, xv, pp. xvi–xvii.

be a coincidence. However, the flurry of supplications in 1441 probably influenced the accusation of defect of dialect made by John Kennochson against the precentor of Caithness three years later. Kennochson was present in the curia during the summer of 1441 and had filed another supplication on the same day that the vicar of Glenorchy was accused of defect of dialect.⁹² They were also probably the inspiration for Walter Bower’s story of the foundation of the diocese of Argyll in *Scotichronicon*, which he based upon the need for a Gaelic bishop who could understand the language of the people who lived there.⁹³

Conclusion

As far as the *cura animarum* was concerned, the controversy about English-speaking clerics in the late medieval *Gaidhealtachd* was illusory, and not grounded in the reality of pastoral care. The notion that Gaelic parishioners would suffer neglect was a red herring, as neither the incumbent clergy nor seemingly the men who supplicated against them intended to serve the cure personally. Spiritual ministrations were almost certainly provided by a hired Gaelic priest in most instances. Here the benefice itself had ceased to be granted to the men to whom it was originally intended and for which the papacy had legislated – the parish priest. The provenance and timing of the supplications are best understood when placed within the context of the local political and ecclesiastical climate in which they were framed. Above all they highlight the lay domination of the Church in Argyll by the clan chiefs.⁹⁴

Iain G. MacDonald
The University of Glasgow

⁹² CSSR 1433–1447, nos 786, 1044.

⁹³ Bower, *Scotichronicon*, iii, pp. 386–91.

⁹⁴ This article was originally given as a paper to the Scottish Church History Society in 2007. My thanks to Graeme MacDonald and Martin MacGregor for their comments on some earlier drafts.

